

Do you really need that medical test or treatment? The answer may be no.



Medical tests and treatments can be helpful when you really need them. For example, there are times when X-rays, antibiotics, or opioid painkillers may be necessary. It's important to get them when they clearly will help you.

But sometimes doctors recommend things that aren't needed. Sometimes they do it because their patients expect and ask for them.

Before you get any medical test or treatment, ask your doctor these **5 questions**:

- 1** Do I really need this test or procedure?
- 2** What are the risks and side effects?
- 3** Are there simpler, safer options?
- 4** What happens if I don't do anything?
- 5** How much does it cost, and will my insurance pay for it?

Learn more about the risks of too many tests and treatments on the other side.

Reasons to avoid medical tests and treatments you don't need:

- **They can harm you.** X-rays and CT scans expose you to radiation. It's okay in small amounts, but repeated exposure can cause cancer. Antibiotics can prevent and treat some bacterial infections, but they can have serious side effects. And, taking them when you don't need them—like for a cold—can cause your body to resist them. Then they won't work when you do need them.
- **They are expensive.** Imaging tests like X-rays, CT scans, MRIs, and others can cost hundreds or thousands of dollars, and you may have to pay part of that. Blood tests that you don't need may not be covered by insurance.
- **They can be a waste of time.** Every test you get means taking time away from work, school, or family, plus the time and hassle of getting there.
- **They can make you anxious.** Waiting for test results can lead to unneeded worry.
- **They can lead to more tests.** False alarms may cause your doctor to order yet more needless tests. Every test increases costs and risks, and may lead to unnecessary procedures and serious complications, including death.

Talk to your doctor about which tests and treatments you need – and which ones you don't need.



An initiative of the ABIM Foundation



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www.choosingwisely.org/patient-resources

This information is to use when talking with your healthcare provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use this information at your own risk.

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